



YOUTH SLANGS IN MODERN AMERICAN AND BRITISH ENGLISH

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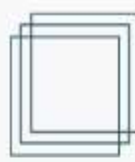
Annotation

This article contains an annotated bibliography of the slang used by young people, and specifically the slang of students, in both Britain and the United States. In addition, there is a brief account of the English influences on foreign youth slang. Some introductory remarks on the expressive nature of the language of such groups are also made.

Keywords: Youth slang, modern, British English, words, slang, psychology, informality, informal, work.

Introduction

Slang is an area of lexis in a permanent state of flux consisting of vivid and colorful words and phrases which characterize various social and professional groups, especially when these terms are used for in-group communication. Slang provides and reinforces social identity but it is also used in society at large to achieve an air of informality and relaxation. Because of its nature and the multiplicity of its aims, slang is a meeting point for people working in different fields, lexicologists, sociolinguists, psychologists, and even for the lay public. However, the study of slang, especially its lexicographic registration, is often overlooked or disregarded, due, in great part, to its ephemerality and the informal, humorous and taboo character of many of its expressions, which leads to the belief that it is a deviation from the standard language. Of all social groups, the young are the most prone to the use and renovation of slang and unconventional language. They exhibit great social dynamism and are receptive to changes in fashion: in clothes, look, style, and also in speech. They have little political power but they may use slang as a counter-cultural tool, as an arm against established authority and conventions. In our modern and cultivated societies, students constitute one large subgroup within the young which deserves special study, for many a time they develop a special kind of vocabulary. As a modest contribution to this area of research, in the present article I have compiled and commented on the bibliography related to the special vocabulary of these two groups in British and American English. Such a restriction on the field of study has led me to try to compile as exhaustive a list as possible, which explains why works of very different approaches and length have been included. The list can be taken as illustrative



and representative of the differences between the range and extensión of the slang used by youth and students in Britain and America in the last decades, which immediately leads us to think of differences in their social environments. It is easy to understand that some social groups are more prone than others to creating and using slang. On the whole, Americans are believed to be much fonder than are the British of using informal and unconventional language, as Mencken well pointed out in his *American Language*. Certainly, there is a large body of general slang which differs noticeably from the British, but in the language used by students these differences are even greater. If slang is said to grow especially in small and somewhat restrained groups, one could argue that daily life of many a student on an American campus, often enclosed in halls and fraternities, helps them to develop a sense of solidarity and to become involved in a similar style of (communal) life. Conversely, the British student, being more integrated in normal living patterns, would tend to favour a more standard language. In this light one could also understand, for example, the paucity of student slang in a country like Spain where, in marked contrast, campus life hardly exists. One perennial problem in the study of student slang is its differentiation from general slang. In effect, a good number of words and expressions classed as student slang are found to belong to the language of youth and other social groups. Outside the specific technical jargon of students, which is easy to trace and minimal in comparison, and the slang notoriously associated to the physical conditions of their life (housing, college, etc.), the expressive language found in it is very similar in its linguistic devices and motives to the one spoken by their non-student peers, for both groups share the same system of beliefs and are involved in similar communicational practices (drugs, music, fanzines, graffiti, etc.). Although the language of these particular fields is predominantly inspired by youth, it has not been included per se in this bibliography, unless they are associated to a particular youth sociolect. For the same reason, I also haven't included articles on slang whose content is general in application (for example, the Lighter/Dumas theoretical article, "Is Slang a Word for Linguists?") or dictionaries and glossaries (e.g. Spears, Thorne, etc.) which have registered words coined or used by youth or students. If some lexicographic works of general outlook are used (for example by Partridge), it is because they contain a section dedicated to the language of these groups. With these provisos—and these limitations—I have compiled the present bibliography. Since the aim of this bibliography is to provide a useful tool for those who wish to do work in this área, many of the references used here have been annotated, except in those cases where the titles themselves are sufficiently explanatory. All entries are listed alphabetically, although they have been previously classified under various thematic sections which discriminate between British and American youth and student slang, and general and special-word studies.

Below are some common teen slang words you might hear:

Dope - Cool or awesome

GOAT - "Greatest of All Time"



Gucci - Good, cool, or going well

Lit - Amazing, cool, or exciting

OMG - An abbreviation for "Oh my gosh" or "Oh my God"

Salty - Bitter, angry, agitated

Sic/Sick - Cool or sweet

Snatched - Looks good, perfect, or fashionable; the new "on fleek"

Fire - Hot, trendy, amazing, or on point (formerly "straight fire")

TBH - To be honest

Tea - Gossip, situation, story, or news

Thirsty - Trying to get attention

YOLO - "You Only Live Once" (often used ironically)

People or Relationships

Relationships are an important aspect of adolescence. In the teen years, kids develop their own identities and explore who they are outside of their families.¹ Interactions with their peers are a key component of this process—and they often create unique words to describe their friendships and romantic relationships.

Here are some slang words your teen might use when talking about other people:

Bae - "Before anyone else," babe, or baby is used to describe a romantic partner or good friend

Basic - Boring, average, or unoriginal

BF/GF - Boyfriend or girlfriend (used when texting, not in conversation)

BFF - "Best friends forever"

Bruh - Bro or dude (all three terms are gender-neutral)

Cap - Fake or a lie

Curve - To reject someone romantically (related to "ghosting")

Emo - Someone who is emotional or a drama queen

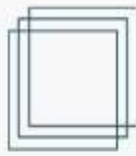
Fam - Group of friends

Flex - To show off

A Karen - A disparaging way to describe a petty middle-aged woman, who is rude, especially to people who work in the service industry. (For example, saying, "What a Karen," about someone who returns their drink at a restaurant for not having enough ice.)

Conclusion:

Teens in each generation develop a unique language of their own. Think "outta sight," "phat," "rents," "gag me with a spoon," "radical," and "peace out." But even though you're a part of youth culture (and the slang that defines it) when you're young, it gets harder to keep up with the latest teen jargon when you are their parent. Trying to figure out what teens are saying is increasingly challenging, as the explosion of social media, memes, digital communication, and the ever-present-cellphone means teen-speak is evolving



faster than ever. Once you think you've mastered a few phrases, you're probably already out of touch again.

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